

Forcing or not?

All auctions are shown without competition

One of the problems for club players is deciding whether partner's call is forcing or not. In some situations it is up to the partnership to agree, but there are many situations where there are standard answers.

There are some important rules:

1. New suits at the three level are forcing.
2. When your partner makes an invitational bid and you show extra values, this creates a game forcing auction. For example:

1♥ 2♣
2NT = 15+ balanced, forcing to game

1♥ 2♦
3♣ = extra values, forcing to game

3. Do NOT pass your partner's forcing bid. If you are playing Acol with three weak twos, then the sequence 2♣ (23+) - 2♦ (relay or weak) - 2♠ (natural) is FORCING TO GAME: you cannot pass just because you have a bad hand!
4. Do NOT double-cross your partner by passing just because you have opened, or responded, with a dubious hand. It is unfair to partner for you to open/respond and then to underbid because you are ashamed of your hand. If you open the bidding, then bid as if you have an opening hand.

There are some sequences that I recommend club players play as game forcing:

1. Fourth suit forcing: in traditional Acol fourth suit forcing does not create a game forcing auction, but this is the modern interpretation. It means that you must hold an opening hand to use fourth suit forcing, but it makes auctions a lot easier.
2. Jump rebids at the three-level. For example,

1♥ 1♠
3♦ You cannot pass this and even 3♥ by the responder is forcing.

The following auctions are those where there is typically confusion. A partnership can make any agreements, but my suggestions are provided.

1♥ 1♠
2♥ 3♠

If you play 1♥-2♠ as a weak jump shift, then 1♥-1♠-2♥-2♠ would show an invitational hand and the sequence shown would be forcing.

However traditionally this is an invitational bid, showing 10-12 points and 6+ spades.

1♥ 2♦
3♦ 3♥

It is worth agreeing that these sequences, whether they involve major+minor, both majors or both minors, are either all forcing or all invitation. Eric Crowhurst, a late friend of mine and Acol theoretician, maintained that some should be forcing and others invitational, but it is really too confusing to do that.

My recommendation is that these should be forcing, as even when you have invitational values the double fit means you should go to game. If you play them as forcing, then it will improve your slam bidding.

1♠ 2♣
2♠ 3♣

Whatever system you play 2♠ almost always shows six spades and a minimum opener. In Acol, 3♣ shows six clubs and invitational values but it is not forcing.

1♥ 2♣
2NT 3♥

For all systems it makes sense that this is a game forcing auction. If you are playing a weak no trump, then the 2NT rebid showing 15+ after a two-level response creates a game force.

1♥ 1♠
2♠ 3♥

See earlier sequence!

1♠ 1NT
2♠ 3♣

For Acol players this is weak because an invitational hand would have responded 2♣ rather than 1NT.

For the increasing number of Short Club players, they have to consider the following sequences too. The difference is that the opener may not have a real club suit.

1♣ 1♥
1NT 2♣ Does it make any difference if 1♣ shows 2+ clubs¹?

1♣ 1♠
2♠ 3♣ Does it make any difference if 1♣ shows 2+ clubs?

¹ Of course if you only open 1♣ with two clubs when you hold 4432, then you must have 3+ clubs as you do not hold four hearts!

Bidding over reverses

A reverse is a rebid by the opener that shows extra strength. Specifically, it occurs when the opener is unbalanced with 16+ points and hears a one-over-one response from their partner. An example auction:

	West	East
♠ 63 ♥ K7 ♦ AKJ6 ♣ KQJ103	1♣	1♥
	2♦	?

The rules for a reverse are:

- You have a second suit whose rank is higher than your first suit.
- Your second suit is **shorter** than your first suit.
- You have a strong hand worth 16+ (or 17+) points.

NOTE THAT YOU SHOULD NOT REVERSE WITH SUITS OF THE SAME LENGTH

A reverse is **forcing for one round**. It is **not** game forcing, so the responder has non-forcing rebids available:

- A return to the opener's first suit is non-forcing, typically showing 6-7 points.
- A raise of the opener's second suit is non-forcing, shows 4-card support and 6-7 points.
- A rebid of the responder's first suit shows 5+ cards and is non-forcing.
- A bid of 2NT is non-forcing but shows a stop in the unbid suit(s) and 6-7 points.

Any other bid is forcing to game, including fourth-suit forcing and a jump rebid of responder's suit:

	West	East
♠ 63 ♥ K7 ♦ AKJ6 ♣ KQJ103	1♣	1♥
	2♦	2♠ ^{ALERT}

2♠ is fourth-suit forcing and the auction cannot finish below game. In this case West can rebid 3♣ and let partner make the next move.

All expert players use conventions, such as Lebensohl or Blackout, to make reverses easier to handle. Like many conventions, they give up a natural bid (normally 2NT) to allow them to distinguish between non-forcing and forcing bids. I do not recommend these except for the most regular and practised partnerships.